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The day the Dalai Lama was muffled by our own aunty

TRUTH be told, delegates at the Happiness and its Causes conference in Darling Harbour last week looked happy enough already. Maybe their secret was the coconut carrot cake and camomile tea served at morning break.

Only wholesome vegetarian fare was on the menu for the sell-out crowd of middle-aged New Agers and Buddhists who crammed the convention hall to see guest star the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan king who flies economy.

At 71, the charismatic Buddhist is also a practical man who believes a healthy body makes a healthy mind and said last week the secret of happiness was "nine hours' sleep".

He and the other speakers at the joy jaw-jaw had less more secrets to divulge. Buddhist man Robbin Courtin's maxim for happiness was: "This is reality. Accept what you have."

San Francisco psychology professor David Matsumoto offered the rules he gives his judo students: "compassion, service to others and discipline".

Arizona psychiatrist Howard Cutler cited research showing that happy people were "more likely to be caring, more willing to reach out and help someone in need".

Melbourne University psychiatry professor Graham Burrows joked: "I don't think anyone is 100 per cent happy - if they were they would be classed as hypermanic and may have a bipolar disorder."

But it was the Dalai Lama whom 2000 people had paid \$695 apiece to see, and on Friday they arrived in the rain at 6.30am for his 9am appearance. He is, after all, the world's most-feted spiritual leader, embraced by world leaders and Hollywood movie stars, unique in a partisan age because his teachings are objectionable to no one, except the Chinese Government, which refuses to give Tibet its freedom.

His friend Bishop Desmond Tutu calls him "the mischievous Dalai Lama" because of his habit of sneaking up behind his fellow Nobel laureate and tickling his armpits, and also, no doubt,



SECRETS OF HAPPINESS: The Sydney Swans kept the Dalai Lama smiling with a jersey presentation yesterday.

Picture: DANIELLE SMITH

because of the unyieldingly courteous way he gets right up Beijing's nose.

So what does the guru prescribe for happiness? For one thing: "The more we care for others the greater our own sense of wellbeing." He also talked of developing "genuine compassion that can reach your enemy".

On materialism he joked: "Richer people should have 100 fingers so they can put on all the diamond rings."

But he kept returning to one theme - the importance of "maximum affection after birth". He said: "The mother should spend more time with the children. Then I think the fullest affectionate atmosphere should create, not by word but through action, the lesson of the value of warm-heartedness".

Perhaps he was remembering his own childhood. The fifth of 16 children of poor farmers, he was identified as the

reincarnation of the Dalai Lama at age three and taken from his mother - "one of the kindest people I have ever known". So began "a somewhat unhappy period of my life", he has said.

He spoke on Friday of Europe, "where people forgot their values of religion and so the influence of the church declined, afterwards family life was more different. As a result I think for young children now nobody is taking care of their inner values. They have grown up in an atmosphere of a lack of human affection. It makes a bad mark in their minds for their whole life."

It was all good, homespun common sense and the delighted audience lapped it up.

But nirvana evaporated when the next session, billed as a "dialogue with the Dalai Lama", was hijacked by the ruthless demands of television.

It emerged that moderator Gerakline

Doogue was simultaneously hosting an episode of ABC TV program *Compus*, with the unwitting conference delegates as studio audience. They soon turned mutinous when the Dalai Lama was relegated to a minor role in favour of panellists such as the Australia Institute's Clive Hamilton.

His Holiness just tucked his feet up, wrapped himself in his crimson robes against the freezing air, and retreated into a Zen-like silence.

"Just let him speak" came grumbles from the back rows.

Not happy, Gerakline. Panellist Magda Szubanski saved the day, interrupting the TV script to fire a few choice questions at the master.

And finally a desperate roar from the crowd implored him to impart one final pearl of wisdom.

"To carry on continuously, that's all." Amen.

Teachers need fair play too

TEACHERS must have been thrilled to find yet another subject they will be forced to teach in an already overcrowded curriculum.

The latest addition for NSW public primary schools from next month is Fair Play, a subject which purportedly teaches children good sportsmanship.

Employing such cartoon characters as Handball Hannah, posters and other fun resources, it will promote "respect, responsibility and teamwork" as part of Sport and Recreation Minister Graham West's campaign against sport rage.

Which is all very worthwhile, except that colouring in work books in the classroom is a dopey way to teach such crucial life skills, which are absorbed only by children actually expending the effort to play sport, learning to abide by the rules of a game and working cooperatively in a team.

Even worse, the more time teachers are forced to spend on subjects that should be the responsibility of family and the broader community, the less time they have for the foundational subjects.

The constant invention of new subjects such as road safety, surf safety, obesity, safe foods and civic values is locking primary teachers into a curriculum straitjacket.

In any case, when it comes to sport rage, it's parents who are often the worst offenders.